American Pub: Health assoc:

Report of the Committee

ON THE

Pollution of Water Supplies

APPOINTED BY THE

American Public Health Association

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING AT MILWAUKEE, WIS.
NOVEMBER 20–23, 1888

Printed for the Michigan State Board of Health.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

ON THE

POLLUTION OF WATER SUPPLIES

APPOINTED BY THE

American Public Health Association

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING AT MILWAUKEE, WIS.

NOVEMBER 20–23, 1888

Reprinted from the Report of the Proceedings of the American Public Health Association

FOR THE

STATE BOARD OF HEALTH OF MICHIGAN

CONCORD, N. H.
Republican Press Association
No. 22 North Main Street
1889

REPORT.

In its report at the last meeting of the Association your committee explained in brief the ground of its belief in the harmfulness of sewage in waters used as potable supplies, whether these were derived from wells or larger sources; whether the water-supply of an isolated dwelling or that of a populous city. Chemical analysis was shown to be in most instances inadequate to the detection of sewage, unless the sewage was present in unusual quantity, or the water unusually free from other organic matters; and the conclusion was reached that the inability of the chemical methods is of no practical importance, as the presence of sewage in the water-supply can be determined by the sanitary inspector; and further, that for protective purposes the knowledge that sewage enters the water is all that seems to be required, because where there is sewage there is danger of typhoid infection.

Your committee desires to give special emphasis to the last stated clause, because it believes that the endemicity of typhoid fever in our cities is in great part due to the sewage in the water-supply. Many of our public water-supplies contain sewage, and its harmfulness in a general way is unquestioned even by those who have a financial interest in them. Yet there appears to be a hesitancy to acknowledge the real, the specific, danger. Typhoid fever is present in all our cities, giving annual death-rates of from 15 to 100 and over in every 100,000 of the population; but in the enumeration of its causes its prevalence is ascribed to many insanitary conditions before mention is made of the public water-supply. It is allowed in certain local epidemics to be propagated from wells which have become infected by an infected sewage, but the sewage in the public supply is seldom considered other than as a sentimental objection to the use of the water. It is allowed in many instances to arise from leaks in the plumbing of houses, by which exhalations from infected sewers reach the interior of the dwelling, but the water-supply into which the sewage of these very sewers is poured is used without a thought of its deadly qualities, unless, as in the case of Plymouth, Pa., the fact is forced upon the public mind that a public water-supply has as little disinfecting power over the germs of typhoid fever as the private water supply of an infected well. Health officers condemn the well, and generally it is closed as soon as it is found that sewage percolates through its area

of drainage;—they should condemn the public supply on the same grounds.

The large financial interests involved in the establishment of a public water-supply may be assumed to be at the bottom of this hesitancy to acknowledge the specific danger attaching to the presence of sewage. Millions of dollars, perhaps, have been invested in that water-supply, and many more millions would be required to replace it by water from a purer source. These large sums are alone considered, and not the vast and annually increasing totals of the loss by sickness and death that might have been prevented. A public or private well involves but a small sum, so small that it does not stand in the way of sanitary progress. It is closed, and with its closure one more possible centre of typhoid infection is removed; but the decreasing influence exercised by this on the annual rate of prevalence is small indeed if the public supply continue to disseminate the disease. The dollars and cents represented by the existing water-works may be regarded as a barricade to sanitary progress, or an altar on which typhoid fever sacrifices its victims.

The efforts that have been made from time to time to quiet the public mind by demonstrating the destruction of sewage and the self-purification of the water which contained it, are in part attributable to these financial interests; but only in part, for many sanitary inquirers have been deceived by partial or imperfect observations. Unfortunately, however, those analysts who have had much practical experience in following the track of sewage in its passage down-stream recognize in this so-called self-purification only the results of sedimentation and dilution. Undoubtedly the natural processes of purification,—the transformation of organic matter into ammonia, and the nitrification of the latter,—operate in the current of a running stream; but these account for but a small proportion of the seeming purification, and there is no ground for supposing that the infectious principle of typhoid fever is given up to the action of these purifying agencies. We acknowledge that typhoid fever is propagated by an infected sewage in a well-water when all organic trace of the sewage has disappeared through the instrumentality of the agencies referred to. There are two kinds of organic matter in the dangerous sewage,—matter which, by the absence of life, is given up to decomposition and reduction to harmless inorganic forms, and matter which by its vitality is preserved from these influences; and we acknowledge that in the well-water the former may be reduced, while the latter retains the full measure of its virulence. Analogy shows conditions of a similar character affecting our river-supplies, and the seeming apathy with which they are regarded can only be accounted for by assuming that individually we have fought against the barricade erected by the dollars and cents, and been defeated by its solidity and strength.

In this country the relation between the distribution of a water which contains sewage and the prevalence of typhoid fever can be readily observed by any one who studies the mortality returns of our cities in connection with the *character* of their water-supply. The records in

many instances are complete and trustworthy for the past twenty years. Brooklyn, New York city, Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, etc., have a death-rate from typhoid fever proportioned to the quantity of sewage which enters their water-supplies. Where the water-supply, as in the first mentioned city, is free from sewage, the death-rate is low, about 15 in every 100,000 of the population, these cases being due to indirect infection and other local causes. When care is exercised in excluding sewage from the water-shed which furnishes the public supply, there is a corresponding freedom from typhoid fever, as in New York, which has a rate of 25, and Boston, which loses about 40 annually for every 100,000 of her people. In Philadelphia and other cities, in which less attention is given to the purity of the public supply, the typhoid death-rates are correspondingly increased. Moreover, the records of some of these cities give interesting information when viewed in connection with the *history* of the water-supply. The city of Baltimore has had a steadily diminishing rate since its water-supply was first introduced, and this decrease has been more notable since 1880, when the supply was largely extended. And this same city of Baltimore shows that its improved condition is not due to the introduction of a system of sewerage, but to the use of a purer water than was formerly furnished by its infected wells. Ordinarily a sewerage system and public water-supply are contemporaneous improvements, and heretofore any benefit to the health of the community has been credited to the sewerage, although it seems as if the inflow of a wholesome water had really more to do with the lessened death-rate, for the small typhoid rate of New Orleans, Louisiana, cannot be attributed to the sewers of that city, since it has none; but it *may* be attributed to the water-supply, for that consists of rain-water, which is free from sewage inasmuch as the cisterns in which it is stored are not sunk in the soil, but raised considerably above the surface.

Testimony of a similar character has recently been developed by the experience of Vienna. In that city, from 1851 to 1874, well-water of an impure character was used to a large extent in addition to a systematized supply from the Danube. During this period the deaths from typhoid fever ranged from 100 to 340 annually in every 100,000 of the population. In the last mentioned year a spring-water was introduced, and the death-rate from typhoid fever fell immediately to 50. Since then, by the disuse of impure wells and the extension of the new supply, the rate for the past three years has fallen to 11; and, inasmuch as the sewerage system was in existence during the period of high rates, the fall since 1874 is necessarily referred to the use of a water which is free from sewage. The fall in the typhoid rate experienced an interruption in 1877, when, owing to the freezing of some of the sources of the spring-supply, the water of the Danube had to be pumped into certain of the mains; and it is of importance to observe that the sections of the city which were chiefly affected by this epidemic were those in which the Danube water was distributed. According to Professor Nothnagel, typhoid fever has become such a rarity since the introduction of the spring-supply that

when a case occasionally comes to hospital from outside the city he shows it to the students as one of unusual interest.

In the face of such testimony to the influence of a pure water on the typhoid rate, we cannot shut our eyes to the relation that exists between sewage in our streams and typhoid fever in the cities that are supplied by them, no matter how great may be the financial interests that are involved or sunk in the contaminated supplies. Now comes the inquiry, What are the measures that have been or should be adopted to lessen the evil ?

As a rule the only effort made by our municipal authorities and water companies to purify our public supplies is by sedimentation. They select a pond which forms a natural sedimenting reservoir, or they throw a dam across a stream to form an artificial one, or, in the case of large water-courses, they pump directly from the stream into specially prepared basins. Primarily these basins or reservoirs were intended to facilitate distribution and guard against a temporarily inadequate flow in the stream which furnishes the supply ; but they were found to answer the purpose of clearing, and to that extent of purifying, a turbid water, provided they were large enough to permit the water to remain undisturbed for the needful length of time. When it is proposed to have additions made to the water-supply of a city, the construction of new basins is usually implied. As an instance, there are now at the city of St. Louis, Missouri, four settling basins, holding eighteen million gallons each. The floors are paved with brick on edge, and slope towards the centre and the river side. The sediment is floated off from the floor of each basin once in about four months, the quantity removed annually amounting nearly to 200,000 cubic yards. The wants of the city permit the water to settle only from eight to eighteen hours, while a period of thirty hours is required for a satisfactory subsidence. On this account an extension of the work is at present in contemplation. Surveys have been made, and land purchased, for larger settling-basins and conduits to carry the water to the present high-service or clear-water pumping-plant. The estimated cost of these improvements is three and a half million dollars.

The storage of a turbid water in such basins undoubtedly tends to improve its quality. No argument is required to show that the St. Louis water is better with its suspended matters at the bottom of the reservoirs than choking the distributing pipes, collecting in every containing vessel in the city or settling in the alimentary tract of the water consumers. The subsidence of the inorganic matters which constitute the mass of the turbidity carries down a considerable proportion of the associated organic materials, and the clear water gives markedly better results as well on chemical analysis as on bacteriological examination.

Chemically considered, the tendency of the cleared water is to further purification. Organic matter steadily diminishes in quantity, and is replaced by ammonia and nitrates ; but as this is effected by bacterial agencies, biologically the stored water progressively deteriorates after it

has become clear by sedimentation. The bacteria increase at the expense of the organic matters which they destroy. A water which every chemist and every bacteriologist would pronounce a fair sample of potable water will be found, after a week of storage, to be swarming with bacteria. Daily experience forbids the condemnation of a good water merely because it has been stored for a week; yet the bacterial colonies that may be developed from it are infinitely more numerous than those that are found in a water which is impure even to the senses. Indeed, the bacteria in an ordinarily pure water, after storage, may be vastly more numerous than in another portion of the same water intentionally contaminated with sewage or other impurity and similarly stored for the same length of time. This it is which deprives the bacterial cultivations of that value which but a short time ago they were expected to develop as indices of the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of a water. A chemical evidence demonstrating a tendency to purification by the conversion of organic matter into nitrates, through the instrumentality of bacterial organisms, is more consistent with every-day observation than the bacteriological evidence which suggests unwholesomeness by demonstrating the numbers of the bacteria.

But although the general tendency is to the reduction of organic matter in stored waters, it often happens, particularly if the water is rich in ammonia or easily decomposed albuminoids, that vegetable growths other than bacteria will be developed, giving a bad taste or odor to the water, and perhaps causing diarrhœa in the consumers. These, which may be considered the accidents of storage, have been studied by many health boards and water companies; and the influence of heat, aeration, exposure to sunlight, etc., on their development, has been determined with practical benefit in many cases.

Sedimentation is sometimes an exceedingly slow process, particularly when the mineral particles consist of finely divided clay. A week or more is required in some instances to give a clear water, and this involves a large expenditure for storage-basins. Hence, many have turned their thoughts to filtration as a prompt and efficient means of purification. Filtering-beds are in general use in England, but in this country they have been constructed only by a few cities, and in an experimental way. The results do not appear to have been satisfactory. The expenses attending them are large, and the coldness of our winters begets difficulties which have not to be encountered in the milder climate of England.

But the failure of filtration on the large scale, and the imperfect results of sedimentation as carried on in the reservoirs, have given an impetus to the construction of filters for domestic use; and the success which has attended attempts to supply a clear water to manufactories and other large establishments has gradually led to more ambitious efforts. Of late some municipalities have investigated the means by which this filtration is effected; and the ability of the filters to supply a clear water on the large scale appears to have been demonstrated. As the method is patented, a certain hesitancy has been manifested by members of the Associa-

tion in referring to it; but, patented or not patented, if it have a value above others in supplying a pure water, we should have full accounts from such of our members as have a practical knowledge of its operations in all their aspects. A member of the American Water-Works Association did not hesitate, at its last meeting, to invite attention to the success achieved at Atlanta, Georgia. He expressed himself as knowing but little of the chemical improvement that took place in the quality of the water, but so far as the mechanical results of the filtration were concerned he was perfectly satisfied. The surface of the water in the impounding reservoir is nineteen feet above the layer of coke and sand which constitutes the filter-bed, through which it is carried by gravity into the clear-water basin. The reservoir-water is generally so muddy from red clay and other suspended impurities that it is rarely fit for bathing or laundry uses; yet in the clear-water basin small objects may be plainly seen through it at a distance of twenty feet. The capacity is three million gallons daily, although the quantity actually filtered for distribution at the time of the report was only two million gallons. The cost of the filters and clear-water basin was $55,000, and the daily expenses eight dollars for alum and two dollars and fifty cents for labor.

So much experience has been gained in the construction of these filters that filtration can no doubt be effected more rapidly and economically under the supervision of the patentees, than on new plans which must be at first regarded as merely experimental. But if the attention of boards of health, water companies, and sanitary engineers were directed to the development of the best filtering-plant, other and better methods might be suggested and carried into practice; or, if the patent process were proved to be superior to all others, the ability to express a prompt approval would be substituted for our present hesitancy. The passage of water through a filter-bed, the regular cleaning of the filtering material, and the addition of alum, iron, lime, or other precipitant, to the water, are the essentials of the process; but the patents necessarily cover only the specific mechanism by which these are brought into operation in that particular process. The natural laws of filtration, and of mechanical and chemical action, are open to the ingenuity of the world.

Recently Mr. L. H. Gardner, of New Orleans, has been experimenting on the large scale with solutions of iron, not as an adjuvant to filtration, but to hasten sedimentation in the settling-basins. Iron as a precipitating or filtering agent has been used in various forms and to a considerable extent, on the large scale, as a water-purifier since Medlock, in 1857, patented a process in which water was treated by contact with metallic iron. Spongy iron attained even a popular repute as a filtering material, but at the present time in Europe it has been displaced by the Anderson process, which is said to be in successful operation at Antwerp, Ostend, Paris, and Vienna. The water in this process is first partially sedimented and then forced through a revolving purifier consisting essentially of a wrought-iron cylinder mounted on hollow trunnions, which serve for inlet and outlet pipes. Curved ledges, running lengthwise of the cylinder on

its inner surface, scoop up and shower down fine borings of cast-iron through the current of the water. By the combined action of the cylinder and the water-current every portion of the latter is brought into contact with the iron, the particles of which are kept constantly bright by friction against each other and the sides of the cylinder. After this the water is passed through sand filter-beds to remove excess of iron. The results claimed are that the organic matter is altered in its chemical nature, and the albuminoid ammonia lessened from one fourth to one half of its original amount; that the water is softened, the scale in boilers becoming greatly reduced, open, friable, and loosely adherent to the plates: and that the microscopic life of the water is, to a large extent, destroyed or removed. At Antwerp the quantity of water thus treated is two million gallons daily, and the engineer in charge of the works and the municipal authorities have expressed their satisfaction with the results attained.

The various methods of purification by iron that have been tried in Europe involve the contact of the water with natural or prepared ore or cast-iron borings or turnings, with a subsequent filtration through sand to eliminate any excess of iron; but Mr. Gardner has suggested the introduction of a solution of iron in the precise quantity needful for the desired purpose. He tried a solution of red hæmatite ore in hydrochloric acid on Mississippi water at the New Orleans water-works, and the clarified water gave satisfactory results to Professor Chandler, of New York, and other chemists. Later, he treated a body of thirteen million gallons in the St. Louis settling-basins. The solution used, the water in various stages of precipitation, and the clear resultant water, all met with favorable reports from the analysts. The action is chemical, not mechanical. The combinations of lime and magnesia in the Mississippi water become converted into chlorides by the chlorine of the iron solution, and the precipitated oxide of iron settles promptly, carrying the suspended matters with it, and leaving the water clear. A solution of the specific gravity 1.6 in the proportion of one part to 20,000, clarifies the muddiest of river-waters without hardening them or leaving in them any excess of the precipitant. The Mississippi water at New Orleans can be thus clarified by a rest of eight hours in the reservoir at an expense of one cent for every thousand gallons Mr. Gardner's object at the present time is to procure a cheaper iron solution.

In the efforts to attain to a prompt and efficient method of purifying water by sedimentation or filtration, with or without the use of precipitants, it is of the utmost importance that the object of the purification be kept steadily in view lest we fall into the error of supposing that the end has been accomplished when a clear water has been obtained. The agents of a certain patent filter place in the show windows of some prominent store two companion glass jars, one filled with an opaque and discolored turbidity overlying a stratum of heavy sediment, and labelled "Water taken this morning from the public mains;" the other, sparkling like a consolidation of dew-drops, and labelled "The public water after

passing through so-and-so's filter." A glance at these gratifies the passer-by, by seeming to instil into his mind so much sanitary knowledge. They sow seeds of reflection which develop and multiply with bacterial fecundity, so that in a few minutes they have done the work of an octavo pamphlet on "Potable water: its impurities and the methods by which they are removed." But the sparkle of the filtered water, although honest in itself, hides a fallacy which undermines the whole of the suggested argument. It must be remembered that clear waters are not necessarily wholesome waters. Their sparkle is no proof of their purity. From the laundresses' point of view, or the paper-makers', the result is satisfactory; but the object of the filtration of a water-supply for domestic or public service is its wholesomeness when used for drinking, and its transparency gives no testimony on this subject.

During sedimentation the heavier and grosser particles of mineral matter readily subside, and carry down with them much of the flocculent organic matter which would otherwise continue in suspension for many days. The effect of sedimentation at St. Louis, Missouri, has been mentioned, but it will perhaps be better appreciated when stated in other words. The lake-supply of Cleveland, Ohio, which is usually of excellent quality, is occasionally turbid, particularly during the spring months. When in this condition of turbidity the twenty million gallons, which are distributed daily, contain ten and a half tons of suspended matters, and the odd half ton consists of decomposing organic substances. Who will say that the city of Cleveland would not be benefited if it did not have that daily distribution of half a ton of semi-putrefaction? But sedimentation does more than free the water from suspended matters. During the so many hours or days of its continuance the processes of nature are at work transforming the semi-putrified matters into ammonia and nitric acid, both of which are harmless in the quantities present. The purifying influence of sedimentation may be easily determined by chemical analysis, and in many cases it is so marked as to render the process of infinite value in the absence of a better method.

Most surface waters, which are turbid from particles of mineral matter, contain the germs of nitrification, and the process of purification takes place in them during storage; but if these germs be absent, months may pass with but little improvement in the character of the stored water. Hence, cisterns which do not contain these bacteria have usually a less pure water, as judged by the ammonia and albuminoid ammonia which it yields, than those which do contain them. Where wooden tanks, as at New Orleans and other southern towns, are used for storage, it is a common occurrence for the analyst to find water of poor quality in new or recently cleaned cisterns, while water of a much better quality is discovered in those that have not been cleaned for a year or two, and have a fermenting sediment a foot or more in depth covering their floor. The nitrifying agencies accumulate with the sediment, and, notwithstanding the sediment, they succeed in reducing the organic matter of the water to the inorganic condition. The sediment is thus an advantage, but the

end is better accomplished by keeping it out of the cistern and introducing the bacterial workers through the medium of a layer of clean gravel or sand.

But withal, it must be remembered that it is only organic matter in a state of decay that is thus reduced to the inorganic condition, and only organic matter in a tangible form that is thus carried down by the heavier particles of the mineral sediment. Organic matters that are endowed with vitality remain uninfluenced by the destructive and reconstructive bacterial agencies that are operating in the water; and these, as has been seen, are the matters from which most is to be feared if sewage has unfortunately had access to the supply. The infected water which prostrated 1,200 of the 8,000 inhabitants of Plymouth, Pa., and killed 130 of those whom it prostrated, passed through three storage reservoirs on its way to accomplish its deadly mission.

Nor is filtration more efficient as a purifier when viewed from the stand-point which sees typhoid fever disseminated by an infected sewage in the water-supply. A satisfactory filtration removes the haze or cloudiness which may pervade a sedimented water for days after the grosser particles have subsided, and in so far its results are better than those generally effected by sedimentation. The finer particles of clay, some no larger than barely distinguishable molecules under the ordinary working powers of the microscope, are removed, and with them organic shreds of similarly minute size, and even many of the bacterial germs which were present. A water thus freed from foreign matter in suspension seems to offer the lustre of its transparency as a voucher or visible symbol of its purity, and chemical analysis may show in it only the merest trace of organic matter in solution, for the processes of decomposition and recomposition of the organic elements take place with much greater rapidity when the water percolates through the pores of the soil, as in the natural process of filtration, than when it is merely stagnant in a reservoir or flowing in the current of a stream. It is now well known that the bacterial agencies which effect these changes have their habitat in the three or four feet of soil which constitutes the surface of the earth, and that in soaking through this layer the organic matters of a water are transformed into matters which the roots of living plants can absorb and assimilate. Chemical analysis may therefore show in such a water merely the small quantities of ammonia or nitric acid which are the results of this bacterial action, and the water may be claimed to be pure on much stronger evidence than can be advanced on behalf of any water which is massed on the surface in a lake, pond, river-bed, or settling-basin, these surface waters having at work in them only those straggling bacteria that have been washed from their habitat in the soil into the current of the stream. In fact, so far as can be demonstrated by chemical tests, the naturally-filtered water may be free from everything of an organic nature.

In view of our knowledge of the conditions needful to a perfect natural filtration, it is impossible to allow that artificial means, operating after

nature's methods, will ever produce as pure a supply as can be procured in suitable localities by digging a hole in the ground. Comparatively speaking, only a small quantity of rain falls on a stated area,—a depth of so many inches during the course of a year,—and of this a large proportion is turned aside for the general police of the surface, and, having fulfilled its mission, is carried off by surface channels to the ocean, while another part of the fall cools the overheated surface of the soil by its evaporation, and gives the air that proportion of moisture which is needful to the continuance of life under present conditions. Only a few inches of the annual rainfall penetrates the soil, and, escaping the roots of the living vegetation, collects on the surface of some impervious stratum as the surplus water poured into a flower-pot drains into the saucer below. Artificial filtration has neither the time nor the surface to effect percolation after nature's method. Filtering-beds of gravel are prepared which permit more water to pass through them in a day than nature percolates through the same area in a year, or special filters are constructed which transmit, under pressure, as much water in half an hour as nature purifies on the same area annually. The bacteria of nitrification cannot be harnessed to the work of artificial filtration, and hence the results of such methods, although manifesting a satisfactory freedom from suspended matters, can in no instance compare with the organic purity which characterizes the spring- and well-waters that are found in the laboratory of nature. Since the bacteria of the artificial filtering-beds are unable to deal with the organic matters dissolved in the percolating water, it is needless to expect them to reduce the masses of organic matter which in progress of time clog the filter with their accumulated foulness, and lessen its efficiency as a filtering medium. The artificial filter cannot, therefore, furnish a water which will be as pure as a naturally pure water. In fact, artificial filtration amounts to little more than the mechanical separation of a water from its suspended particles, while the essential of natural filtration is the thorough nitrification of the albuminoids of the water, the removal of suspended matters being incidental and merely secondary.

The decay of once living organisms, animal or vegetable, gives more or less taint of a putrefactive nature to the surface-waters of the earth, and this taint, when of sufficient strength, is known to induce diarrhœal tendencies in the human system. Moreover, among the fermentations which take place during the destruction of organic matter, is one which gives origin to an influence,—the malarial,—which is always disabling, and often deadly, to human life, pervading the surface-waters to a dangerous extent, particularly in warm climates and seasons. By the process of filtration nature removes both the putrescent and malarial taints from the water, yielding a supply which is held to be pure and wholesome by the ever-increasing testimony of the generations of the world. The malarial influence is attributed to a micro-organism. If this view be correct,—and the tendency of medical science is to accept it as the only theory which gives a satisfactory explanation of the malarial phe-

nomena,—the vitality of the germ should preserve it from the putrefactive and nitrifying agencies, for these operate only on dead matter. It is therefore probable that only the mechanical part of the process of natural filtration is concerned in the removal of the malarial influence from a water, and that an artificial filtration which gives satisfactory mechanical results will be of value in the prevention of malarial disease.

Although the bacteria of the soil do their work so thoroughly that no chemical trace of existing organic matter can be found in the percolated water, it sometimes happens that this water is unwholesome. When collected at a distance from the haunts of man, it is as pure as it looks, for nature's methods always suffice for her necessities; but where the activities of human life create artificial conditions, such as result from the aggregation of individuals in cities and towns, her methods fail because they cannot be carried out. The soil becomes more and more contaminated by animal excreta, and the wells reservoirs in which are collected the leachings or washings of this impurity. If the impure soil be colonized by the infection of typhoid fever, it is immediately converted into a breeding ground for the germs of that disease. The vitality of these germs preserves them from putrefactive agencies, and their size seems to offer no obstacle to their passage through the soil. They therefore drain into the well, and confer upon its clear waters powers of a most deadly character. In the records of sanitary science are to be found many epidemics of typhoid fever chargeable to wells that have become contaminated by sewage. Indeed, the more the transmission of typhoid fever is studied, the more evident it is that the water-supply is the main agency concerned in its propagation. Hence, sanitary officers have not only closed up wells into which sewage has entered, but those which, from their situation, are merely exposed to this danger.

Since natural filtration is powerless against the infection of typhoid, it is evident that artificial methods can give no guaranty of protection.

The purifying influence of precipitation by means of such chemicals as alum, iron, or lime can readily be demonstrated by chemical analysis. The hydrated alumina, ferric oxide, and lime carbonate, as they materialize into particulate existence from their solution in the water, entangle and carry down with them organic particles that would otherwise be less easily removed; and biological research shows that bacterial germs are swept from the water in like manner. That this operation is imperfect is demonstrated by the number of colonies which can be developed from the cleared water; that it is purely mechanical and not germicidal is indicated by our experimental knowledge of the action of such substances on various bacterial organisms, and by the fact that their presence does not exercise even an antiseptic influence on the bacteria of the water, as the number of these bacteria subsequently increases in the cleared water as rapidly as in a stored water which has had no such chemical treatment. The commercial interests concerned in artificial filtration invest these substances with the title of coagulants, as if the albuminoid constituents of inorganic life curdled into a bacterial *rigor mortis* as soon

as the water became pervaded with the presence of the precipitant; but there is no warrant for a belief in any protective virtue other than that connected with a mechanical entanglement and precipitation.

The processes of purification that have just been reviewed remove suspended matters and more or less of the dissolved saline and organic substances that are present in the water, but none of them can lay claim to the removal or destruction of the causative agencies of the acute infectious diseases that are known to be propagated by an infected water-supply. These processes have been closely studied by the English sanitary authorities, who long ago came to the conclusion that sewage in a water is harmful because it may contain the germ of cholera or typhoid fever, against which the most efficient method of artificial filtration constitutes no effective safeguard. Hence, the object of sanitary legislation in England is not to preserve the rivers as a drinking-supply, but to prevent them from becoming a nuisance in their character of open sewers. The solids of sewage consist of a highly nitrogenized organic matter, the proper disposition of which in the economy of nature is as materials for the growth of the vegetable kingdom, and if these be separated, the water may be purified by percolation and filtration and returned to the rivers. Sewage has accordingly been treated in various ways for the separation of the solids and the reclamation of its water. In country houses and small communities a cesspool can be provided for the deposition of solids, the liquid overflow being conveyed by drain-pipes into the soil. The effluent water in such cases may be as pure to chemical tests as that of the stream into which it is discharged. But as communities grow, the difficulties attending the disposition of their sewage are proportionately augmented.

Various methods of precipitation have been tried with the view of paying expenses by the sale of the solids as a fertilizing material, while the separated liquids are turned into the water-courses, with or without an intermediate filtration through the soil. Sewage irrigation has also been tried on the large scale, and in many instances with satisfactory results. The advocates of irrigation point with considerable enthusiasm to the purity of the effluent water, and consider that this system will ultimately settle the vexed question of the disposition of sewage; and, indeed, such is the purifying influence of the soil, that the clear water of the outflow gives relatively good results on analysis. But, as we have seen in speaking of sewage-polluted wells, the purity which is evidenced by chemical tests fails to give an assurance of protection from typhoid fever, and it is this protection, not chemical purity, which is the object in view. These advocates claim that typhoid fever does not prevail in the fields which receive the sewage of an infected city, but it is the propagation by drinking-water, not by exhalation, in which we are interested, and typhoid fever is known to have prevailed on fields where the effluent water was used for drinking. Indeed, how could we expect otherwise when we know that typhoid fever is propagated by an infected sewage in a well-water which has undergone a more efficient filtration through

the soil than that to which the sewage is subjected in the irrigating fields, or when we remember that the spring-waters which occasioned the epidemic at Lauzen were derived from a sewage-polluted stream spread over the fields of an adjoining valley for purposes of irrigation?

In view of the considerations which we have thus briefly reviewed, we cite the opinion of the English commissioners, to give it greater emphasis as reaffirmed after the passage of years which have added much to our knowledge of the propagation of infectious diseases by means of the water-supply: "Of all the processes which have been proposed for the purification of water or of water polluted by excrementitious matters, there is not one which is sufficiently effective to warrant the use, for dietetic purposes, of water which has been so contaminated. In our own opinion, therefore, rivers which have received sewage, even if that sewage has been purified before its discharge, are not safe sources of potable water." A water to which sewage has access should from that fact alone be excluded from all further consideration as a possible water-supply for drinking purposes.

The introduction of a water-supply into a growing city is ordinarily only a question of money. Engineering difficulties fade into insignificance when surveyed from a satisfactory financial standpoint. It is often said to be beyond the power of money to purchase health, but the sanitary student can readily demonstrate that in many cases this is not so. Money expended in the distribution of a wholesome water-supply will purchase health for the thousands who otherwise fall victims to the fever which is endemic in our cities and towns. Typhoid fever is a disease to which every one is exposed. The susceptibility to it is inherent in our constitutions, and, so far as we know, immunity can be purchased only by submitting to attack. Ordinarily the human constitution succumbs to its influence before maturity is reached, but if up to that period we fortunately escape, we have no assurance of future immunity. Uncertainty overhangs us like a cloud. Danger is as present with us in the daily routine of our peaceful lives as on the battle-field, only that the embodiment of evil is an invisible and intangible germ instead of a fast-flying bullet. Danger flows beside us in our streams, in our mains, from the taps in our houses. The germ of the disease may not be in this pitcherful or in that, in this tumblerful or in that, but it will find us some day if we continue to use the water which contains it. In a town of 50,000 inhabitants one victim is taken daily, and as the average duration of this disease is about a month, there are always in that city thirty persons whose lives are unnecessarily trembling in the balance.

What is the local suffering from yellow fever in Jacksonville, Pensacola, or New Orleans, once in so many years, compared with the totality of the destruction caused by the steady progress of this general and ever-present scourge? Thirty thousand people die of typhoid fever annually in the United States of America, and Vienna lowered her losses by this fever from 340 to 11 annually in every 100,000 of her population by introducing a spring-water supply instead of the sewage-tainted

waters of the Danube. Calculate the loss by sickness associated with these 30.000 deaths,—the loss of work, the unprofitable work of nursing, and the actual outlay necessitated by each visitation of the disease,—and you will find that saving money by drinking sewage in the water-supply is a penny-wise policy that in the long run will fail to pay even for the funerals and the mourning goods.

In many instances it is, on this continent, an easy matter to obtain a suitable supply for a community. Some neighboring lake offers itself as a natural reservoir, requiring only the construction of conduits for the transmission of its waters; or an artificial reservoir may be formed by damming certain of the radicles of a neighboring stream. The drainage area of this supply must be kept under the closest supervision by the sanitary authorities of the community, for it is not enough to obtain a supply which is free from sewage: it must be kept so. Constant vigilance is the price of safety. The sanitary inspector should be ever on guard and familiar with every square yard of the surface, and the health authorities should be empowered to protect the many against the carelessness or wanton encroachments of the few. The question of water-supply is here reduced to its simplest terms: the raising of sufficient money to bring in the wholesome water, and the investment of the health officer with power to preserve the wholesome quality of the public supply and to prevent the use of water from sources which are known to be unwholesome.

In other instances, it is difficult to obtain a suitable water-supply. The whole face of the country has been more or less settled, and the natural drainage of every valley brings sewage and manufacturing waste into its outflowing stream. Nevertheless, now is the time to act, for these unfavorable conditions will increase and multiply in the future, so that what may be done now cannot be done then without a tenfold expenditure of time and money. Fortunately, when difficulties occur from the density of the settlement, there is also more wealth to meet the increased expenditure, but it is beyond the power of that wealth to give life to those who have in the meantime fallen victims, or consolation to the hearts that are in mourning. What is to be done should in all cases be done at once. It is *we* who are interested in this matter,—now, in our own time and generation: for what does it avail us that the city is supplied with pure water ten years hence, if at that time it be remarked of us, Oh, yes, I remember him well; he died of typhoid fever eight or nine years ago. And it is an easy matter to so arrange the financial burden that part of it shall fall on those who will hereafter participate in the benefits.

In well settled sections of the country it may be impossible for the towns and villages to obtain a water free from sewage in their main streams or their neighboring tributaries, and equally impossible for any one of them to go to the nearest sources of pure water for a supply, but those favorably situated for combined action may easily perfect their arrangements for bringing in the water from long distances. Nor should

it be forgotten that if water free from sewage is not to be obtained on the neighboring surface, it may sometimes be found beneath the surface, as at Brooklyn, L. I., or, more notably, at Memphis, Tenn., where, after a thorough investigation of the whole subject by a committee of citizens, it was ultimately developed that they had a source of the purest water within a hundred yards of their domestic hearths.

Many communities have a water-supply which was pure enough when originally introduced, but which has become dangerous by the subsequent growth and development of which it formed the nucleus. A water-bed or basin cannot be used for concurrent purposes of water-supply and sewage discharge. If the drainage area be given up to settlement and commercial enterprise, with their consequent sewage and manufacturing waste, the city must be prepared to find another source of supply for its daily wants, or pay the penalty of an increased death-rate from preventable disease. In the race for material prosperity this penalty is too often forgotten, and the endemic fever is regarded as one of those visitations of Providence that are inevitably consequent upon conditions of aggregation. Yet every intelligent medical man knows the fallacy of this reasoning, and that the progress of this malady can be checked by suitable measures as surely as exotic disease can be kept out of the country by properly enforced restrictions on commerce. To permit the citizen to enjoy life, which, according to the constitution of the United States, is his right, the most stringent laws should be enforced to preserve the purity of the supply of drinking-water; or, if the settlements on the area are too valuable to be destroyed, a new source of supply should be obtained and guarded.

The protection of the citizen requires that every advantage be taken of our knowledge of the natural history of the typhoid infection, that it may be destroyed before reaching any of our water-courses. It is well enough to insist upon the purification of sewage by processes of precipitation, filtration, or irrigation before its water is delivered into the natural courses, for thereby the latter will be prevented from falling into the condition of open sewers, which is the lot of so many small streams in well peopled districts; but these processes cannot be depended upon to remove the typhoid infection. This infection passes from the patient to our surface-waters directly by the sewers, or it drains through the soil with the subsoil-water, and reaches the surface on some lower level. Of course in either case it may be lost in the mass of water in which it is diffused, but it was not so lost at Plymouth nor at Lauzen. To protect the citizen and stamp out this fever, it should be made the duty of every medical man who attends a case of fever to see that the excreta are disinfected before being consigned to the sink, cesspool, or sewers, and the utmost care in this regard should be taken in cases occurring on a watershed which is utilized for a public supply. So far as our knowledge goes, sewage would be deprived of that which, under ordinary conditions, constitutes its only dangerous element, were this system of bedroom disinfection efficiently practised.

Local authorities, such as water companies and boards, citizens' committees, health boards, and commissioners, should exercise a jealous guard over the public water-supply; but in many instances these would be powerless without the intervention and coöperation of the authorities of the state. Massachusetts, Illinois, and Minnesota have already taken steps in this direction. In the first mentioned state the board of health is invested with the general supervision of the water-supplies. No sewage, drainage, excrement, or other refuse or polluting matter of such kind or amount as—either by itself or in connection with other matter—will corrupt or impair the purity of a water used for domestic purposes, is permitted to be delivered into a water-course or any of its feeders within twenty miles above the point where a water-supply is taken. Upon the application of a city or town to the supreme court, alleging the pollution of its water supply in violation of law, an injunction may be issued, or the polluting substances required to be so cleaned or purified that they shall no longer be deleterious. The limit of twenty miles in this law is a defect, but sanitary legislation is a thing of slow progress, and our friends in Massachusetts undoubtedly secured as much as was possible for them to obtain at the time.

The board is required to examine the waters from time to time, for the purpose of ascertaining whether they are adapted for use as domestic water-supplies, or are likely to impair the interests or imperil the health of the public. It is required to conduct experiments to determine the best practicable methods of purification, of drainage, and of the disposal of refuse, and to recommend measures for the preservation of the purity of the waters. Moreover, it is the legally constituted adviser of cities, towns, corporations, firms, or individuals, in matters pertaining to the introduction of water-supplies or sewerage systems, making use of its knowledge and facilities on their behalf in regard to source and quality of water and methods of sewage disposal, having regard to the present and prospective needs and interests of other communities or individuals that might be affected thereby. The approval of the board is a legal requirement to the consideration by the legislature of any application for authority to introduce any system of water-supply or sewerage.

The board is also empowered to consult with and advise those engaged, or intending to engage, in any manufacturing or other business as to the best practicable method of intercepting, purifying, or disposing of any drainage or refuse that might result from the business to the detriment of the waters of the state. It is required to bring to the notice of the attorney-general all instances which may come to its knowledge of omission to comply with existing laws respecting the pollution of water-supplies and inland waters, and to report to the legislature any specific cases not covered by the provisions of existing laws which, in its opinion, call for further legislation. Finally, and very materially, the board is provided with funds to sustain the corps of engineers, chemists, and inspectors, whose labors are needful to the proper performance of its duties.

The report of the board's proceedings under these heads, submitted to the legislature in January of this year, shows the excellent work that may be accomplished in this way. Eleven applications from cities and towns for advice concerning water-supplies were received; eleven for advice concerning sewerage; two soliciting action to prevent the contamination of particular water-supplies; and one from a manufacturer for advice concerning the disposal of drainage from certain works which he purposed establishing. The important question of a water-supply for the cities of Boston, Chelsea, and Somerville, and the town of Everett, was one of those that came before the board. There are 123 sources of public water-supply in the state; but over 200 samples are investigated chemically and biologically every month, the samples being from rivers, ponds, and other sources that may be utilized in the future. Experiments are also in progress on methods of sewage-disposal, which will add considerably to our knowledge of the results which may be obtained in that direction.

With the aid of the state, the local authorities in their efforts to obtain and preserve a wholesome water-supply would experience no difficulty that could not be overcome by the expenditure of the necessary funds. The twenty-mile limit will in progress of time be blotted out, and the waters of the state be sharply divided into those which may be used as sources of domestic supply and those which carry off the waste water. The water-supply and sewerage systems of the state—of the country—should be as distinct as those of every household, and the sooner this is accomplished the sooner will the rates of sickness and death be decreased among our people.

Your committee, therefore, urge a livelier interest in this important matter on the part of state boards of health, an interest which is not satisfied with discussing and subscribing to sanitary views of the subject, but which will leave nothing undone that will tend to invest them with power to act for the preservation of the public health. With all our boards operating, each within its domain, there would be no need of a committee of this Association to investigate the subject of water-pollution. In concluding, we submit the following resolution:

Resolved, That it is the well considered belief of this ASSOCIATION that it is an imperative necessity, especially in the more populous states, that state legislatures should give their boards of health that financial support which would enable them to act intelligently on all questions pertaining to the public water-supplies, investing them at the same time with the supervision of the said supplies, and with power to preserve these waters from contamination by sewage or other injurious matters.

CHARLES SMART.
S. W. ABBOTT.
G. C. ASHMUN.
W. W. DANIELLS.
EDWARD PLAYTER.